

EPA Proposes the Atlantic Fleet weapons Training Area on Vieques and Culebra for Inclusion on the Superfund National Priorities List

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New York, New York - The U.S.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today proposed to add certain areas on and around the islands of Vieques and Culebra, in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, to the National Priorities List (NPL) of the country's most contaminated hazardous waste sites. The Commonwealth identified these areas collectively as the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area (AFWTA) in its request to list the facility. The proposed listing honors the request by Puerto Rico Governor Sila Calderon to list the Commonwealth's highest priority facility on the NPL. EPA is seeking public comments on the proposed listing during the 60-day public comment period that begins today.



"The proposed inclusion of this facility on the Superfund list is a major milestone for the Commonwealth and the people of Puerto Rico," said EPA Regional Administrator Jane M. Kenny. "EPA will continue our close collaboration with Puerto Rico, and encourages full public involvement as we look toward the cleanup of these magnificent islands."

The AFWTA facility includes land areas, waters and cays in and around the islands of Vieques and Culebra impacted by 100 years of military training operations, largely by the U.S. Navy. The Navy used the eastern portion of Vieques for training from the 1940's until it ceased operations there on May 1, 2003. Areas of Culebra were used for military exercises from 1902 until July 1975. Contaminants of the land and water resulting from these activities may include mercury, lead, copper, magnesium, lithium, perchlorate, TNT, napalm, depleted uranium, PCBs, solvents and pesticides.

The Superfund law entitles each state to designate a single facility for inclusion on the NPL without ranking it against other sites for its potential threat to people's health or the environment. In June 2003, Governor Calderon exercised the Commonwealth's one-time right to select its highest priority facility with the request to list areas of Vieques and Culebra on the NPL. Today's listing also proposes an alternate approach for adding the AFWTA facility to the NPL. It would separate the final decision on listing Culebra from the final listing of Vieques. EPA will go forward with a final rule listing Vieques and postpone the final listing of Culebra to allow the completion of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Puerto Rico and the Army. The MOA will govern the response actions necessary to protect human health and the environment on Culebra. EPA, Puerto Rico and the Army have agreed to pursue this alternate arrangement. The terms or progress under such an agreement may determine the point at which it may be appropriate to withdraw the proposal to list the Culebra areas. The government of Puerto Rico and the Army have begun discussions with the goal of reaching an agreement on the timely investigation and cleanup of Culebra through the Army's Formerly Utilized Defense Sites (FUDS) program. The Army, through the Corps of Engineers, executes the FUDS program in accordance with Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, known as CERCLA, and its National Contingency Plan.

EPA is currently addressing contaminated areas on the eastern side of Vieques through a consent order with the Navy under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Under

the order, the Agency is overseeing the investigation of 12 contaminated areas outside of the live impact area, which was active when the order was signed, and has identified close to 40 additional areas of concern. EPA is also providing guidance on the Navy's investigation of potentially contaminated sites on the western end of Vieques to determine what cleanup actions are needed. The progress made on these investigations will be incorporated into the Superfund work. Information about the ongoing investigations can be found on EPA's Web site at:

<http://www.epa.gov/region02/vieques/index.html>

Detailed information on the proposed NPL listing, including the Federal Register notice announcing the listing, supporting documents and instructions for submitting public comments, can be found at: <http://www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/npl/newnpl.htm>. The documents will also be available for viewing in hard copy at information repositories on Vieques and Culebra, and in San Juan, Washington, DC and New York City. To make arrangements to view the documents, contact Daniel Rodriguez in Vieques at (787) 741-5201 or Dennis Munhall in New York at 212-637-4343.